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(54) Amusement-with-prizes gaming machines

(57) A fruit machine installation provides the facility both for normal games, in which winnings up to a certain amount are paid out or credited as cash but winnings in excess of that amount are paid out or credited as tokens, and for skill games which can be paid for by tokens and for which prizes are awarded as cash.

AMUSEMENT-WITH-PRIZES GAMING MACHINES

This invention relates to coin-released amusement-with-prizes gaming machines and particularly,
5 but not exclusively, to so-called "fruit machines".

In a conventional fruit machine there are three or four rotatable reels, or their optical equivalents, which carry a series of symbols (which need not be fruits) and prizes are awarded primarily in dependence
10 upon the combination of symbols that is achieved on a combination line or in a combination field when the reels stop spinning.

15 At the present time, in accordance with the U.K. gaming laws, a maximum cash price of £2 is arranged to be payable by many machines. For larger wins the win is paid out to the player in tokens, and the current maximum for such token payments is £4.

20 When a player wins tokens he can either re-insert the tokens into the machine in order to play further games or he can take them to the barman or proprietor of the establishment in which the fruit machine is situated to have the tokens exchanged for a prize or
25 prizes, usually drinks, cigarettes or other items on sale in the establishment.

30 Players generally much prefer to receive their winnings in cash rather than tokens. The barman often dislikes dealing with the tokens for various reasons. For example he is usually attending to his other duties, and the process by which such tokens are subsequently fed back into the machine by the barman
35 can later lead to disputes with the person responsible

for collection of money from the machine, as to the amount re-inserted.

According to the invention we provide a coin-released amusement-with-prizes gaming machine installation of the kind which is arranged to pay out prizes in cash for wins up to a predetermined maximum cash amount, or to record those prizes on a cash credit register for subsequently paying out as cash, and to pay out prizes in tokens for wins greater than that amount, or to record those prizes on a token credit register for subsequently paying out as tokens, or of the kind in which all prizes are paid out as tokens or recorded on a token credit register, the installation being so arranged as to permit the machine player to choose to play a game involving player skill that is paid for by the player inserting into the installation one or more tokens, or by decrementing said token credit register if provided, any winnings in the skill game being paid out, or credited, to the player as cash.

Thus, the installation is arranged to provide, as an alternative to the normal games playable on the machine, a skill game which the player can choose to play in order to spend his tokens or token credits that he has won in previous games, and if he is successful in playing the skill game the winnings are in cash.

The amount of the average winnings in a skill game is preferably made equal to the value of the tokens inserted for initiating the skill games.

The installation may comprise only a single gaming machine in which case the machine itself is provided with the facility for playing the skill game, but if desired the skill game may be provided by a separate

skill game machine which may be alongside or in the vicinity of the machine which provides the normal games in which tokens may be awarded as winnings.

5 An advantage of providing the skill game in a separate machine is that the main machine can be freed for other players whilst a player is playing the skill games with his tokens.

10 When the skill game and normal games are afforded by a single machine then it would be possible to provide a separate token slot into which the player inserts a token to select a skill game, but preferably only a single slot is provided which is also used for coins and tokens to pay for a normal game, and a player-operable means is provided to enable the player to choose either a normal game or a skill game when he inserts a token.

15 20 The player-operable means may simply be a button which the player presses if he requires a skill game rather than a normal game.

25 It should be appreciated that the use of the term "skill game" is not intended to imply that the normal game on such an installation does not involve an element of skill. The normal game or games may or may not involve some degree of skill and, indeed, the skill game could be identical to one or more of the elements of the normal game, but then other elements of the normal game will involve less skill than the skill involved in the skill game.

30 35. The nature of the skill game is not important to the invention, except that it should preferably involve sufficient skill so as not to come within the

provisions of the relevant gaming laws as representing in itself a game of chance. That is, if a machine were to be constructed in which the skill game was the only game playable on the machine that machine would be 5 considered to be a skill-with-prizes machine rather than a gaming machine.

Currently, in the United Kingdom, the term "game of chance" is defined in Section 52(1) of the Gaming 10 Act 1968.

A preferred feature of the invention is primarily concerned with preventing someone who has a stock of tokens, which he has not obtained by recently playing 15 the machine installation, from playing the skill game and, in effect, converting many of them into cash.

According to the preferred feature the machine installation is arranged to record the numbers of tokens paid out, or credited, by the installation in 20 recent games and to determine the availability of the skill game in dependence upon the recorded number.

When the installation comprises two separate 25 machines to provide the normal and skill games respectively, a data link would be provided between the machines to communicate said recorded number.

Preferably the availability of the skill game is 30 automatically determined such that substantially only that number of tokens paid out in recent games on the installation can be accepted for playing skill games.

Alternatively, however, the availability of the 35 skill game could be determined such that more, or

possibly less, tokens than have been paid out in recent games can be accepted for playing skill games.

5 It might, for example, be desirable to enable a few more tokens to be used in skill games than have recently been won, to cater for a player who has a few tokens in his pocket from playing the machine on an earlier occasion.

10 If desired the installation may be arranged such that the skill game is playable not only by inserting tokens into the installation but by inserting cash into the installation, or decrementing a cash register.

15 Various embodiments of the invention will now be described by way of example only.

20 A first embodiment provides a simple skill game that incorporates the "Illuminated Name" feature commonly used on most modern fruit machines. Each letter of the fruit machine name is individually lit by means of a lamp located behind the glass. During the time the conventional amusement with prizes game is in progress, various letters of the name are lit for various reasons - the end result usually being that when, eventually, all letters are lit, and hence the whole machine name is fully illuminated, a prize is awarded to the player.

30 The player, having pressed a "Press for Skill Game - Token Exchange" button now inserts a token into the coin mechanism of the machine - the token value being 20 pence for example. This causes the "Illuminated Name" lamp arrangement described above to commence flashing in the following manner. The individual letters are each illuminated in turn starting at the

left and progressing towards the right so that when the last letter of the name (the one furthest to the right) is lit it follows that the whole of the name is then illuminated. After this all the letters go out and the sequence immediately starts all over again with the letters illuminating from left to right.

The skill needed is the skill required of a player to press the button at the instant when all the letters in the name are lit and thus "freeze" the name in its fully illuminated state.

When the player succeeds in this he is awarded 20 pence in cash because of his skilful use of the feature. He has thus used his skill to exchange a 20 pence token for 20p in cash.

The player repeats this cycle as many times as he chooses within the limitation of the number of tokens in his possession. He inserts a token, plays a game of skill and, provided he is successful, he receives his reward in cash.

The speed of the flashing sequence can be set as desired but would usually be set such as to enable most players to be successful for a majority of skill game plays.

In a second embodiment of the invention it is arranged that on the occasions upon which the player has been unsuccessful in converting his 20 pence token into 20p cash, the 20p cash amount is loaded into a "reserve" and remains there until the next game when, provided the player is successful, he is awarded the 20p in cash as usual, plus the 20p cash from the reserve. This feature may be further extended whereby

20p is loaded into the "Reserve" for every consecutive losing game so that when the player, or some other player, eventually wins, he re-coups all of the accumulated losses stored in the "reserve" in respect 5 of those losing games.

In a third embodiment of the invention the skill game could be so arranged as to give a successful player a larger cash prize than the 20 pence token 10 inserted.

In such an arrangement, it would be necessary to arrange the speed of the flashing light sequence so as to make it more difficult for the player to complete 15 the name.

Alternatively, the game of skill could be so arranged as to give a range of different prizes dependant upon the number of letters lit by the player; 20 the greater the number of illuminated letters the bigger is the prize.

When the player either runs out of tokens to exchange or no longer wishes to play the skill game, he 25 presses another button on the front of the machine and the machine reverts back to the Amusement with Prizes game.

It will be appreciated that the functioning of the 30 machine is controlled by suitable software.

CLAIMS

1. A coin-released amusement-with-prizes gaming machine installation of the kind which is arranged to pay out prizes in cash for wins up to a predetermined maximum cash amount, or to record those prizes on a cash credit register for subsequently paying out as cash, and to pay out prizes in tokens for wins greater than that amount, or to record those prizes on a token credit register for subsequently paying out as tokens, or of the kind in which all prizes are paid out as tokens or recorded on a token credit register, the installation being so arranged as to permit the machine player to choose to play a game involving player skill that is paid for by the player inserting into the installation one or more tokens, or by decrementing said token credit register if provided, any winnings in the skill game being paid out, or credited, to the player as cash.
2. A machine installation as claimed in Claim 1 which is so arranged that the amount of the average winnings in a skill game is made equal to the value of the tokens inserted for initiating the skill games.
3. A machine installation as claimed in Claim 1 or Claim 2 comprising only a single gaming machine which provides the facility for playing both a normal game and the skill game.
4. A machine installation as claimed in Claim 3 in which the skill game is arranged to be selected by the act of inserting a token into a token slot.

5. A machine installation as claimed in Claim 3 in which a single slot is provided for the insertion of both coins or tokens and a player-operable means is provided to enable the player to choose either a normal game or a skill game when he inserts a token.
- 10 6. A machine installation as claimed in Claim 5 in which the player-operable means comprises a player-operable button which when pressed selects a skill game rather than a normal game.
- 15 7. A machine installation as claimed in any of the preceding claims so arranged as to record the numbers of tokens paid out, or credited, by the installation in recent games and to determine the availability of the skill game in dependence upon the recorded number.
- 20 8. A machine installation as claimed in Claim 7 in which the availability of the skill game is automatically determined such that substantially only that number of tokens paid out in recent games on the installation can be accepted for playing skill games.
- 25 9. A machine installation as claimed in any of the preceding claims and so arranged that the skill game is playable not only by inserting tokens into the installation but by inserting cash into the installation, or decrementing a cash register.
- 30 10. A machine installation substantially as described herein with particular reference to the first embodiment.
- 35 11. A machine installation substantially as described herein with particular reference to the second embodiment.

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12. A machine installation substantially as described herein with particular reference to the third embodiment.

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